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Applicant Screening Processes:

Lessons from the World of Work and
Applications for Education

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The attrition rate from the teaching profession between school years 1993-1994 and 1994-95 was 6.6% in public schools and 11.9% in private schools. 16.2% of former public school teachers and 17.1% of former private school teachers cited homemaking and/or child rearing as their primary occupation status in 1994-95. Twenty percent of former public school teachers and one-third of former private school teachers were employed elsewhere. The main occupation for former teachers working outside of elementary or secondary education in 1994-95 was employment in a private company, business, or individual for wages, salary, or commission (NCES, 1995). In the six years since this study on characteristics of stayers, movers, and leavers was conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics, the number of professionals leaving teaching has increased while the number of quality applicants has decreased.

“Today’s market is a candidate’s market. For employers, a strong economy and record low unemployment figures have meant intense competition for the best and the brightest” (Wong, 2000). The candidate’s market holds true for both the business world and the world of education. This current market requires leaders to look for ways to improve recruiting and hiring processes. A successful process will not only increase the success rate of attracting good employees, but also retaining them. Although attracting good candidates and retaining good candidates is a primary focus of every human resources department, creating a system that maximizes the time and energies of the managers or administrators is critical. It is only through an effective screening process that schools and businesses can assure that the time spent “wooing” a candidate is time spent “wooing” good candidates.

Research on applicant screening in education is nearly non-existent. Although local Assistant Superintendents for Human Resources say they screen applicants prior to calling for an interview, no set standard was used or shared. The variety of things looked for in these informal screenings ranged from grade point average to outside activities to neatness and grammatical prowess. With no strong research or standard process from local administrators, it is incumbent that we look to the business world for effective screening practices.

THE BUSINESS WORLD - THREE THEMES

A review of practices from the business world points to three recurrent themes and concepts: pre-employment tests, electronic screening, and applicant tracking systems. A recent American Management Association survey showed that 43 percent of its responding members assess applicants with basic math and/or literacy tests; 60 percent required specific job-skill testing of applicants; and 31 percent use psychological tests (Nicholson, 2000). Although Fortune 500 companies might have the resources to hire trained personnel in psychometrics, smaller businesses do not have the financial resources for this type of expenditure. Fortunately, there are companies and research that can assist smaller businesses with developing reliable and valid pre-employment tests. Pre-employment assessments generally include either qualifying or disqualifying tests. Qualifying tests include basic skills tests, cognitive ability and aptitude tests, physical ability tests and personality test indicators. Each of these tests is designed to determine whether or not an applicant is qualified for the job. Disqualifying tests work to screen out applicants that an employer doesn't want in the selection pool. Disqualifying tests may include drug tests, medical exams, and honesty and integrity tests.

Determining the type of test to use is critical and requires the employer to look at the job description to identify the tasks and duties to be measured. Once the focus of the test is determined, logistics such as whether the test will be written or computerized, where the test will be given, the amount of time and cost the company can incur, and who will administer the test must be addressed. Finally a company must determine if a test meeting their needs is available and whether or not there are any legal ramifications to administering the test. Special note should be given to whether or not the test violates the Americans with Disabilities Act or Title VII. In addition, the use of pre-employment testing can protect employers from cases of negligent hiring. "Testing provides probative evidence that the employer met its duty to reasonably investigate an applicant's fitness which can reduce exposure to negligent hiring claims" (Nicholson, 2000).

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Administering pre-employment tests continue to raise significant liability issues that an employer must be careful to assess to avoid litigation regarding the test selection. At least ten states have an explicit right to privacy included in their state constitution that can apply to employment tests. A case heard by the California Court of Appeals in 1991 resulted in a \$2 million dollar settlement. The case stated that certain portions of a personality test given to applicants for security guard positions violated the state constitutional right to privacy, as well as state anti-discrimination laws (Rolnick, 1998). A more likely argument regarding a pre-employment test would be that the test produces an adverse impact upon a protested group. A case arguing adverse impact would compare the percentage of minority applicants who passed the test with the percent of majority applicants who passed the test. Generally an adverse impact occurs in cases where the minority pass rate is less than four-fifths, or 80%, of the majority pass rate (Rolnick, 1998). Because of this potential for litigation, it is incumbent that employers seek validation of any pre-employment test prior to its use.

Employers have options once the type of test is determined. They may create their own or opt to purchase from the commercial market. The Buros Institute at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is an excellent resource for businesses looking to purchase from the commercial market. The "Tests in Print" list available at the Buros Institute lists more than 2,900 commercially available tests including 560 vocational and 676 personality tests. Although the Institute is careful about not recommending certain tests, they can tailor test searches for several criteria. This service helps potential customers find the best fit when searching for pre-employment tests. Companies should avoid developing their own test unless they have an employee with experience in test development and validation. If this expert is not available, many businesses elect to hire a consultant to insure that the test developed is linked to job performance.

Pre-employment testing is not a new concept. Although it was common in the 1960s and 1970s, it fell out of favor in the early 1980s. The change in the job market and the need for business to insure that their practices are fair and equitable has caused the resurgence

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of this hiring practice. Currently 40 percent of the Fortune 100 companies utilize some form of pre-employment testing.

In addition to pre-employment tests, another recurring theme in the literature on business hiring trends is the use of electronic screening. Human resource personnel must make the best use of their time. Unfortunately, too much time is devoted to "screening an enormous number of resumes for a handful of useful facts about candidates" (Sheley, 1995). In large companies such as Motorola the use of electronic screening has reduced the average time for bringing on a new employee from 6 months to 46 days. The Motorola system scans applications for key words while also categorizing applicants into key areas.

Although Motorola created their own electronic screening device, there are a variety of companies that specialize in electronic screening. One company, IntelliMatch, Inc., converts resumes from a summary of experience to a summary of skills. This allows their clients to match candidates to particular job requirements. This electronic screening system searches applicants according to skill level, recency, years of experience, geography, education and other specifics set by the employer. IntelliMatch users have found a five to ten-fold decrease in the time between initial approval of an opening and their first contact with candidates (Sheley, 1995).

Another major company offering services in electronic screening is PeopleWise. The PeopleWise website states that "PeopleWise is a leading national pre-employment screening company offering online background screening solutions that combine speed, legal compliance, and comprehensive information". One PeopleWise service, InstaCheck, allows clients to check applicants' identity, previous address, and employment eligibility in less than 30 seconds. Clients needing more detail or job specific information can receive additional reports. In just 4 to 72 hours PeopleWise can deliver national criminal background checks, driving records, credit reports and previous employment verification.

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The PeopleWise website also proclaims that PeopleWise background information, release forms, reports, and procedures are in full compliance with federal law. More than just operating within the federal law, PeopleWise claims to help clients reduce their risk of claims associated with negligent hiring, negligent retention, discrimination and workplace violence. PeopleWise enlisted the aid of the law firm of Littler Mendelson to ensure that the employment screening software complies with federal law. Littler Mendelson reviewed the PeopleWise software to ensure that those using it were made aware of all aspects of applicable federal law (Hazelwood, 1999).

Electronic screening may occur online, as with PeopleWise, or through a computer system such as with IntelliMatch. However, the use of automated telephone systems as a form of electronic screening are also on the rise. Through these automated telephone systems, applicants call a toll free number and answer a series of questions by using the keypad on the telephone. Kinko's Inc. is one company that utilizes the automated telephone screening process. The Kinko's system requires applicants to answer a two-tiered series of questions. The first-tier are questions typically found on employment applications regarding experience and availability. If the answers satisfy eligibility standards, the applicant proceeds to the second-tier questions designed to pinpoint candidates that match Kinko's business needs.

The Kinko's automated electronic screening system "eliminates the possibility of any unintended bias on the part of local managers or recruiters" (Hays, 1999). Through the system all applicants are asked the same questions and there is a guarantee that the questions asked are related to the job requirements. Automated telephone screening systems come with a price. The Kinko's system provided by Interim Assessment Services costs anywhere between \$7.50 per call up to \$11.00 per call. The price variance depends on how much time an applicant spends on the system and whether or not they move to the second-tier questions. The first week using the system Kinko's received approximately 20,000 calls. At least one-third of the applicants did not make it through the first-tier questions saving the company many hours of applicant screening.

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A critical element that should go hand in hand with the use of electronic screening devices is an applicant tracking system. This third and final theme from the world of business is a result of many factors: the need to collect data on applicants; the influx of applicants due to the world wide web; and a desire to make the application process user friendly for the applicants. Like pre-employment tests, applicant-tracking systems can be created internally or bought from the commercial market. Whichever route a business takes; there are four elements that all applicant-tracking systems should offer:

- Tracking and monitoring of inbound candidates by source
- Tracking of candidates through the screening, evaluation, and hiring process
- Ability to share information about each candidate, such as interview or reference notes
- Tracking and reporting on recruiting metrics, such as cost per hire and time to fill (Lachnit & Raphael).

Use of an applicant tracking system allows for an employer to insure that applicants are not lost in the paper shuffle. In addition, the tracking of applicants can assist human resource managers identify the key characteristics of successful employees. In the education field, applicant tracking could allow school districts to track whether one university generates a larger percent of successful candidates than another university thus narrowing the list of job fairs attended.

The three themes discovered in a review of business literature are noted in a variety of businesses both large and small. Walt Disney World is one corporation putting these theories to effective use. In Orlando, Florida, the Magic Kingdom, Epcot Center and Disney MGM Studios make Disney the largest single-site employer in the United States. To maintain an effective hiring process, Disney employs 500 human resource professionals; has 1500 current job descriptions on file; and operates within 10 collective bargaining agreements with 32 unions (Rubis, 1998). On a typical day, the Disney employment offices process between 150 and 200 entry level applications and about 100 jobs are filled each day through hires, transfers and promotion. With an average of 600 hires a week, Disney employs approximately 33,000 employees each year. The Disney

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Corporation screens employees at a variety of levels. Interested applicants initiate a phone screening by calling an 800 number. Candidates who call for a phone screening may or may not be scheduled for a personal interview. Throughout the phone screening and interview process, applicants are told employment conditions a minimum of five times. This process is designed to help applicants "opt out" if they're unwilling to meet the employment criterion that includes grooming requirements. Immediately preceding the interview, candidates are shown an introductory video about working for Disney. At this point between 10% and 20 % of applicants walk out without interviewing. Of interest is the fact that references are not checked on entry-level applicants. The Disney Corporation feels the employment system with phone screening and an "opt out" philosophy effectively screens employees. To track applications, Disney utilizes an electronic system of scanning and storing all resumes.

THE WORLD OF EDUCATION

As can be seen by a cursory review of three themes from the world of business, the screening of applicants is a complex and potentially time consuming prospect. In addition, it is evident that applicant screening includes much more than looking at an application; it includes aspects of pre-employment testing, screening practices and the tracking of applications.

Though there is little evidence of screening requirements for public education, in March 1996 the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics reviewed indicators public schools reviewed prior to hiring.

A review of the data in Table 1 leads to a variety of questions. Why has there been an increase in the use of test indicators? Under what circumstances do districts make greater use of emergency or temporary certification? Does the size of the pool of prospective teachers have an effect on hiring criteria? To what extent do districts and states use performance-based components?

Table 1

	1987-88	1990-91
Full Standard State Certification	82.58	84.12
Graduation from State-Approved Teacher Education Program	70.11	69.81
Emergency or Temporary Certification	66.61	68.80
College Major/Minor in Field Taught	67.20	66.15
Passage of State Test of Basic Skills	23.54	34.07
Passage of National Teachers Examination	21.35	29.51
Passage of District Test of Basic Skills or Subject Knowledge	2.62	4.32

In general most indicators saw little change in their usage during the hiring process. This was not true for the use of test indicators that increased in all areas. It is likely that the increase in the use of test indicators mirrors the public and professional attention being given to upgrading the professional standards for teachers.

The following public education recommendations are gleaned from a variety of research and practice from the business world.

- Establish your culture and hire to fit your culture
- Create specific written job descriptions to outline what you want
- Avoid crisis hiring – all applicants should be screened and ready to interview – even when no positions are available
- Only interview complete employment applications – make this procedure known to your candidates
- Create an applicant flow tracking process
- Train others to assist with the screening process
- Screen all applicants within 7 to 42 hours of making application

How would these ideas “play out” in public education? Based on readings from the business world, a two-tiered screening process is recommended. This process would include both a paper and phone-screening component. Because the job of screening candidates in a timely fashion is an important concept, it is necessary for school districts

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to train others to help with the screening process. Clerical support staff can be trained to complete the paper screening and aspiring administrators can be trained to conduct the phone screening. The training of additional staff not only insures that candidates are screened in a timely fashion, but it insures that administrators are using their time wisely by interviewing only the “cream of the crop”.

Critical elements to the paper screening checklist should include whether or not all paperwork is complete and on file; if appropriate certification is held; if the teacher graduated from an accredited program; if the teacher passed the NTE/Praxis, if required; and a minimum standard GPA at or above 3.0. The Appendix highlights a sample Paper Screening Form. This ten-point paper screening is designed to focus on the items listed above as well as indicators of past success and responses that align with the district’s mission. Applicants receiving eight or more points on the screening device are referred to a trained individual who conducts a phone screening.

Phone screenings are just that “a screening”. Because of this, the phone screen should last only about ten minutes. It is equally as important that the applicant fully understand the purpose of the phone screening and the remainder of the hiring process. As a courtesy to the applicant, screeners are advised to prearrange an appointment to conduct the phone screening. This will allow the applicant to arrange his or her schedule to accommodate a ten minute uninterrupted phone conversation. In addition, trained employees conducting the phone screening are encouraged to script responses; avoid use of speakerphone; and to be friendly and professional. In the competitive market, it is incumbent that the professional conducting the phone screening recognizes that s/he is also operating as a public relations person for the district. If the applicant’s experience with the phone screening is negative, s/he will have a negative view of the district. In converse, if the applicant feels that the phone screener was clear, concise, friendly, and professional, the applicant will realize that the district is focused, friendly and professional.

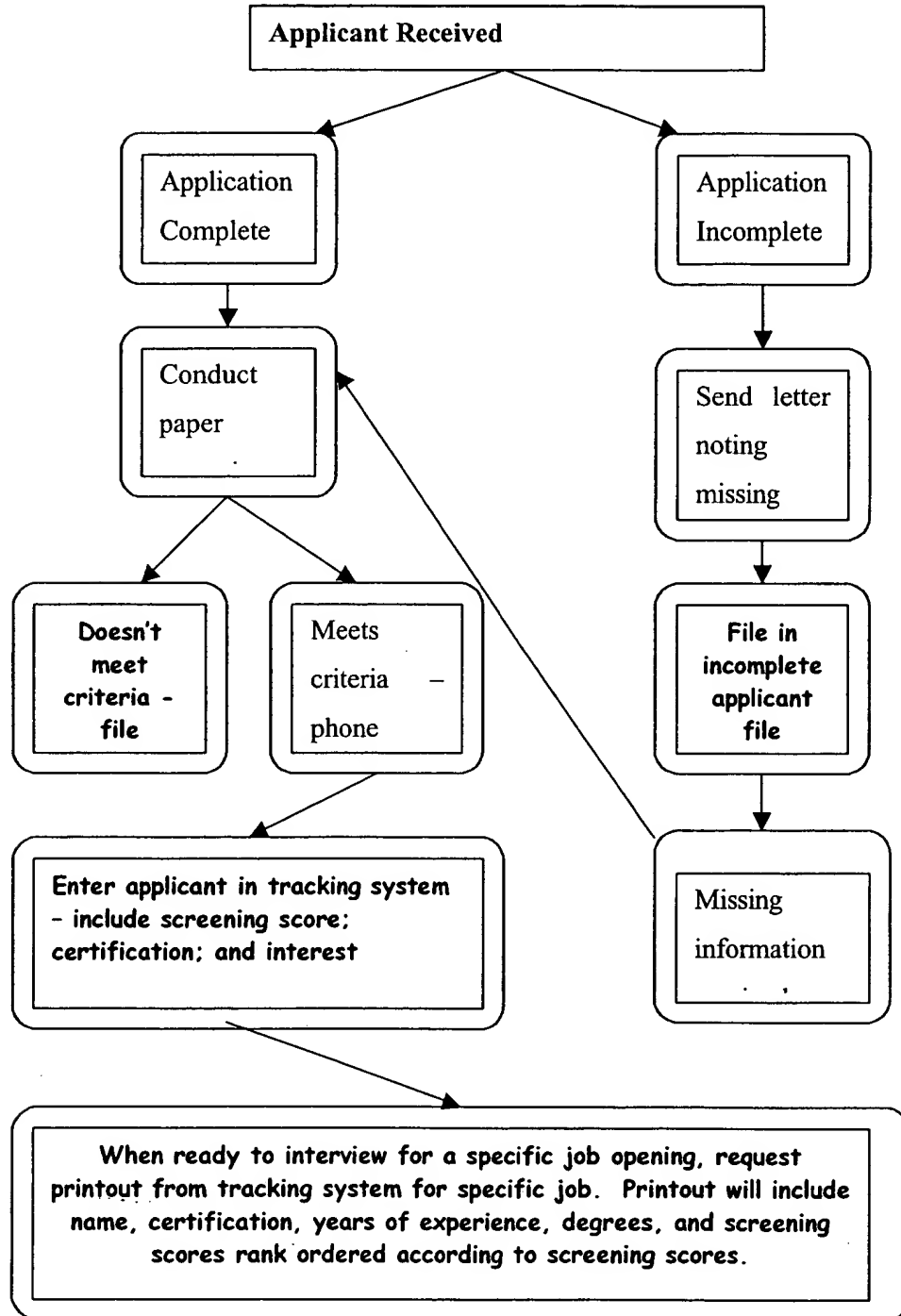
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Thanks to the work of a prior University of Kansas masters cohort, the Phone Screening Questionnaire in the Appendix was designed using eight questions developed by this cohort group. Each question is scored on a three-point rubric to generate a raw score of the applicant's response. Once the phone interview is complete, it is the responsibility of the screener to complete the Phone Screening Questionnaire and return all items to the human resources office.

Paper management and applicant tracking are often not effectively achieved by school systems. Creating an Excel or Access tracking system that allows for disaggregation of applicants according to certification, areas of interest, and ranking based on scores on the phone screening questionnaire will help administrators further identify quality candidates to bring before an interview team.

The business world is light years ahead of public education as related to the concepts of screening applicants. Although the recommendations in this paper may seem small or insignificant, they will do wonders for streamlining the applicant screening process and tracking of applicants. Designing this system for screening candidates using a broad base of trained employees will maximize the amount of time administrators spend interviewing and recruiting highly-qualified applicants while increasing the amount of time administrators have available for other important instructional leadership tasks.

Pre-Interview Screening Process



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Paper Screening Form

Applicant: _____

Certification: _____

Give one point for each statement with a positive response.

- _____ All paperwork is on file
- _____ Applicant holds appropriate certification
- _____ Applicant graduated from an accredited program
- _____ Applicant has passed the NTE/Praxis
- _____ Applicant has a GPA of 3.0 or above
- _____ Applicant has dropped two or less courses
- _____ Resume or application lists one or more outside interests
e.g. clubs, volunteer work, hobbies,
- _____ Application includes no misspelled words
- _____ Application is neatly written and well-organized
- _____ Applicants responses to questions align with district mission

/10 Total Points

0-7 Points

Applicant doesn't meet criteria. Place paper screening form in applicants file and add to tracking system. File with other applicants not meeting criteria.

8-10 Points

Attach paper screening form to application file and forward to phone screening personnel.

Paper Screening Completed by _____

Date: _____

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Phone Screening Questionnaire

Applicant: _____

Certification: _____

Phone Interview Date and Time: _____

1. Explain hiring process
2. Conduct Phone Screening Interview

You have a student who has not completed several assignments within your allotted time frame. What would you do?

2pts - try to define the problem, modify assignments such as shortening them, use of computer, oral rather than written, check work as student is doing it.

1 pt - allow student to make up the work

0 pts - blame students or parents

Tell about a unit you have taught that was successful. What planning and preparation made the unit successful?

2 pts - students provided background for unit, variety of teaching styles, lists variety of resources

1 pts - develop daily lesson plans from teacher guide using one or two outside resources.

0 pts - no resources used, directly from textbook, had no real planning.

How do you decide what to teach?

2 pts - student interest, district curriculum, ability level, state standards.

1 pt - gradually progress through content area, structure of subject independent of students.

0 pts - follow textbook from back to front, teach what's given to me, do what other teachers do.

How do you assess student learning?

2 pts - informal assessment, portfolio, lists various alternative assessments and methods

1 pt - Tests, quizzes, daily class work

0 pts - Test scores

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How do you involve parents in your educational program?

2 pts - gives several examples such as volunteering to work with students, serving on school based committees, invites parents to partner by working with individual students or tutoring

1 pt - non-specific response, sees parents at Open House and conferences

0 pts - suggests families should not be involved and school and home are separate and should not overlap.

What contributions can you make on an instructional team?

2 pts - mentions past experience, demonstrated knowledge of multiple teaching strategies, enjoys team collaboration, prefers working in groups, helps formulate teams

1 pt - will participate when asked, contributes opinions

0 pts - prefers to work alone, thinks committees are a waste of time

Besides your assigned duties, what do you do to help the school run smoothly?

2 pts - name committees served on, volunteer time, extra duty, responsibility for student supervision, attitude of flexibility, work towards solutions

1 pt - mentions following school procedures, performs all duties, courteous to coworkers

0 pts - minds own business, deflects responsibility for making the building run smoothly

What do you do to evaluate the effectiveness of your lessons?

2 pts - mentions more than one type of assessment such as pre and post testing, student involvement in activity, student ability to restate the lesson, student ability to apply the material, observation, teacher questions to check for student understanding, and other specific strategies

1 pt - mentions only formal testing

0 pts - mentions no assessment

3. Ask applicant if s/he has any additional questions.
4. Thank applicant for his/her time. Restate hiring process.
5. Score phone screening and send screening sheet and applicant file to Human Resources office.

Screened by: _____

Screening Score: /16

Comments:

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